

Saint Venceslas



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By

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COVER ART: Equestrian statue of Wenceslas I, Duke of Bohemia, sculpted by Josef Václav Myslbek. The statue is Wenceslas Square in Prague (Czech Republic). *

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Translator's Note

Many interesting links connect England with the land of the Czechs. One has given rise to elaborate controversies on Shakespeare's knowledge of geography, for the poet assigned a seacoast to the medieval Kingdom of Bohemia.

A permanent reminder of mutual prowess and chivalry is the motto of the Prince of Wales: "Ich Diem," which was adopted by the Black Prince when he slew a gallant opponent, King John of Bohemia, at the Battle of Crecy in 1346.

Princess Elizabeth, "Queen of Hearts," daughter of James I of England, as consort of Frederick V of Bohemia, played a considerable role during the checkered political history of Central Europe in the 17th century.

In our own day, Czech Legions in the world war, fighting spontaneously as England's allies, have cemented ties of friendship between the two peoples forever.

However, the annual English tribute to Bohemia's great national saint as patron of Christmas charity most popularly binds Czech and English citizens. The carol Good King Wenceslas is sung at Christmastide throughout Great Britain, where no doubt more details of the saint's life and good works will be welcome.

Words to the popular Christmas Hymn are provided on the next page of this booklet.

Good King Wenceslas

(Composed by J. M. Neale based on Czech Legends.)

1. Good King Wenceslas looked out
On the Feast of Stephen,
When the snow lay round about,
Deep and crisp and even,
Brightly shone the moon that night,
Though the frost was cruel,
When a poor man came in sight,
Gathering winter fuel.

2. "Hither, Page, and stand by me,
If thou knowest it, telling,
Yonder peasant, who is he?
Where and what his dwelling?"
"Sire, he lives a good league hence,
Underneath the mountain,
Right against the forest fence
By Saint Agnes' fountain."

3. "Bring me flesh and bring me wine,
Bring me pine logs hither,
Thou and I shall see him dine
When we bear them thither."
Page and Monarch forth they went,
Forth they went together.
Through the rude wind's wild lament
And the bitter weather.

4. "Sire, the night grows darker now
And the wind blows stronger;
Fails my heart, I know not how,
I can go no longer."
"Mark my footsteps, my good Page!
Tread thou in them boldly!
Thou shalt find the winter wind
Freeze thy blood less coldly."

5. In his master's steps he trod,
Where the snow lay dinted,
Heat was in the very sod,
Which the Saint had printed.
Therefore, Christian men, be sure,
Wealth or rank possessing,
Ye who now do bless the poor
Shall yourselves find blessing.



A THOUSAND years ago, Saint Wenceslas, Ruler of the Czechs was martyred for the Christian Faith by his brother, Bolesla, at Stara Boleslav near Prague.

Saint Wenceslas, born “Svaty Vaclav,” is a pacific hero. He remains the center of religious cult and national life in Czechy (Bohemia), venerated by his own people and by faithful Catholics around the world.

According to a patriotic legend, an army with King Wenceslas at its head is sleeping under Mount Blanik and it will arise to deliver the country during times of great national danger.

Research by the distinguished historian, Professor Pekar, translations from the German by the Reverend Father Striz, the work “*Svati Vaclav*” by Monsignor Stejskal, as well as exhaustive studies by Doctor Podlaha provide abundant material for the life of Saint Wenceslas.

The earliest documentary legend concerning Wenceslas dates from the first half of the tenth century. It was discovered by the Russian, Vostokoff, in 1830. It is written in Old Slav with Glagolite letters. Another legend, dating from the tenth century, was recently found by Professor Nikolsky. The Saint’s earliest biography was written in Latin. It begins, “*Crescente Fide Christiana*,” and is probably of Bavarian origin. It was used by Bishop Gombold of Mantua when compiling another biography at the wish of Emperor Otto II.

Manuscripts from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries can be found in the libraries of Prague and in the Convent of Boeddecke in Westphalia, contain the legend (edited by the Jesuit Father Balbin in the seventeenth century and by Father Suysken in the eighteenth century) for the *Acta Sanctorum*. Father Athanasius’s version in 1767, Joseph Emler’s version in 1873, and Doctor Pekar’s Latin version of 1906 (translated by Professor Truhler and Father Striz in 1921) give us the authentic narrative as first written by the monk, Christian, at the injunction of his nephew Saint Adalbert, Bishop of Prague. This monk, living at the close of the tenth century, was able to investigate and control the various accounts and reports relating to Wenceslas. Therefore, Christian’s document may be taken as historically accurate, purged of exaggeration and fancy, and containing authentic facts. It clears the memory of Drahomira, mother of Saint Wenceslas, to whose influence, as in so many parallel cases, tradition ascribed the acts committed by the evil men around her. Drahomira was a Christian, and, if she did not effectively oppose the pagan element at Court, did penance for her shortcomings to the end of her life. The document also proves the existence of the Slav Rite in Bohemia a hundred and fifty years after its introduction by Saint Cyril and Saint Methodius.

While the monk, Christian, was writing regarding Saint Wenceslas in Bohemia, another Czech monk, Vavrinets (Lorenzo), was doing the same at Monte Cassino, and a third treated the subject in rhythmic Latin beginning, "*Oportet nos fratres . . .*"

A legend from the thirteenth century, "*Oriente jam sole . . .*" acclaims Saint Wenceslas as deliverer of the Czechs from the German yoke. A script, "*Vita Saint Wenceslai ut annuntietur*," commemorates the virtues of the saint and the miracles he wrought. Emperor Charles IV, the "Father of his Country," also wrote the biography of Saint Wenceslas. A series of works on Saint Wenceslas in several languages testifies to general interest in the martyr.

Life of Saint Wenceslas (907 – 929)

SAINT WENCESLAS was born in 907, probably at Stochow, a village still extant near Prague. His father, Vratislav, a younger son of Prince Borivoj of the House of Premyslides, governed a portion of the land during the reign of his elder brother, Sphytihnev. Upon the death of Sphytihnev in 915, Vratislav ascended the throne. The Saint's mother, Drahomira, was the daughter of a Prince of the Lutici, a Slav tribe then inhabiting the country of Brandenburg, which was afterwards Germanized. Wenceslas was baptized in the Slav Rite by Father Paul, a disciple of Saint Methodius and chaplain of Princess Ludmila, grandmother of the infant. Princess Ludmila was a woman of great learning and sanctity, was one of the earliest Czech saints to be canonized, and remains a beloved figure in the history of the nation. Together with Father Paul, Ludmila superintended the education of young Wenceslas who was an apt and eager pupil. He was taught the psalms, the liturgy, and the elements of what knowledge is necessary to a future ruler, who is bound to defend as well as govern his people. At Budec College, Wenceslas acquired Latin, the cultural language of the time, and became as proficient as any aspirant to Holy Orders. He was also fully instructed in the science of warfare and the manipulation of arms, being destined, like all the princes of his time, to direct in practice as well as in theory whatever military measures were undertaken to protect his country.

The death of his father, Vratislav, who was killed in battle by the Magyars, interrupted the lad's studies, for he was called to succeed. Since he was still a minor, his mother, Drahomira, acted as regent and guardian of her seven children. Drahomira is represented as jealous of Princess Ludmila's ascendancy over Wenceslas. Drahomira lent an ear to the courtiers who asserted that Wenceslas was being trained for a monastic life rather than for a throne. Drahomira has been accused of conniving at, or even instigating, the wicked plans of her semi-Christianized courtiers, two of whom compassed the death of the venerable Princess Ludmila at her castle in Tetin in 921. At that time, the pagan

element prevailed so strongly at the Court of Drahomira, even after the banishment of the two murderers, that Wenceslas could receive priests and other friends only in secret and at night.

On attaining his majority, the young sovereign boldly grasped the reins of government, and issued a proclamation that he would observe divine laws and punish murder severely, but still endeavor to be clement and just in all things. Drahomira, at first banished to Budec, was soon recalled to Prague by her son and we hear no more of the criminal disposition with which she had been charged, no doubt by interested calumniators intent on shifting blame from themselves. Wenceslas transferred the remains of his grandmother, Ludmila, to Saint George's Church in the capital where they received public veneration.

The young Sovereign practiced Christian virtue to a degree that has identified his name with charity, beneficence, and justice. He was particularly attentive to the trials of criminals, tempered punishments, showed special mercy to the poor, and enforced better treatment of prisoners. His generosity was boundless. With his own hands, he gathered fuel in the royal forests and conveyed it to indigent homes. He ransomed the slaves captured in war and had them instructed and baptized. Wenceslas was an example in assiduity at Divine Worship and prepared, with his own hands, the bread and wine for the Holy Sacrifice. He built numerous churches, recalled the banished clergy, and took every possible means to spread Christian civilization and religious truth.

However, good Prince Wenceslas did not neglect the duty of maintaining the integrity of his fatherland. He had an efficient, well-clad, well-armed, and thoroughly disciplined army. Nevertheless, he was careful not to expose rashly the lives of his men. When a marauding tribe entered his territory, Wenceslas challenged its Chief, Rastislav, to settle the matter by single combat and thus avoid wanton effusion of blood. Rastislav agreed, sallied forth to meet his opponent, and dropped his weapons at the sight of a luminous cross above the head of the saint and of an angel on each side. Wenceslas did not misuse his triumph. He ceded a large tract of land and a castle to Rastislav for the duration of his life, on condition that these should ultimately revert to the Crown of Bohemia, thus furthering the consolidation and unity of the Kingdom. Another proof of his political sagacity was his treaty with the German ruler, Henry, who marched on Prague with such forces that Wenceslas could not hope to defeat them. Wenceslas offered negotiation instead of warfare and consented to pay tribute in money and cattle as well as to recognize the suzerainty of the German Monarch.

Thus, Wenceslas averted his country's subjugation and the horrors of devastation and massacre in a hopeless struggle. The land of the Czechs was recognized as an entity, instead of being annexed and absorbed by its powerful neighbor. Other Slav groups in Northern Europe, whose chiefs had less perspicacity, wore themselves out in ceaseless

strife against their Teuton adversaries and were eventually blotted out. Relations between Henry of Germany and Wenceslas were cordial and often marked by deference of the former to the latter. On one occasion at a reunion of Bavarian and other princes that was presided over by the German Monarch, Wenceslas was late. King Henry exclaimed angrily that no doubt the delay was due to the long prayers of the Czech and suggested that nobody should greet him when he appeared. At the moment of his entrance, however, Henry was the first to advance and embrace him, declaring that Wenceslas brought the grace of God amongst them.

After laboring successfully to develop the economic resources of his people and promote their spiritual welfare in every way, Wenceslas bethought himself of retiring to Rome and embracing a monastic life. However, before renouncing the throne in favor of his brother, Boleslas, he wished to see the completion of the Cathedral of Saint Vitus. He had initiated its construction to house worthily a relic of Saint Vitus that had been presented to him by King Henry upon the occasion of the treaty mentioned above, when hostilities between Czechs and Germans were averted. Unfortunately, Wenceslas was not destined to see his wish fulfilled. The dedication of the Cathedral took place after his martyrdom.

Prince Boleslas had not enjoyed the benefits of an upbringing under the auspices of the saintly grandmother, Princess Ludmila. He had been left to the care of semi-pagan courtiers and he easily acquired their mode of thought and rough ways. He and the rough courtiers resented the strict rules of conduct enforced by Wenceslas who was, moreover, too mild and virtuous to suit their idea of the strong ruler required by Bohemia. Prince Boleslas had, for his share of inheritance, a tract of land beyond the River Elbe, and he built himself a fine castle at the confluence of that river with the Jisera. It is said that he commanded the chief men of the district to make him a stone residence after the Roman fashion. However, they, having an abundance of timber at hand, proceeded to erect a wooden palace in the usual style, whereupon he beheaded some and reduced the others to obedience.

Prince Boleslas, the very opposite of Wenceslas, gathered round him a crowd of malcontents to whom the acts of Wenceslas were a constant reproach, for these men scorned to repress their passions or modify their evil lives. A plot was hatched to remove Wenceslas and replace him by his more accommodating brother who was unlikely to put a restraint on morals or to hinder freebooting expeditions. Boleslas agreed to usurp his brother's place, conniving even at the planned murder. Realizing it would be impossible to seize Wenceslas in the strongly-fortified royal residence at Prague, Boleslas went in person to invite Wenceslas to his castle at Stara Boleslav for the patronal feast of the church. On 27 September in the year of 929, on the Feast of Saints Cosmas and Damian, Wenceslas assisted at the celebrations in Stara Boleslav and remained after Mass, at his

brother's request, to witness the games and contests arranged in honor of the day. The conspirators had intended to assassinate him as he sat at the banquet but, when they looked on his tranquil countenance, their courage failed. As Wenceslas left the hall, two of his retainers approached him and warned him that something was afoot. They had a saddled horse in readiness and urged him to make his escape. However, Wenceslas refused and returned instead to the banquet hall and resumed his seat. He lifted his glass and called on the company to toast, "Saint Michael, whom we pray to guide us to peace and eternal joy." Not all of those present answered, "Amen," but Wenceslas withdrew undisturbed and recited the psalms as usual before laying down to rest. Meantime, the conspirators conferred at the house of Hnevys and summoned Boleslas to assist. It was resolved that Wenceslas should be slain on his way to early morning Mass. Boleslas gave orders to the priests of the Saints Cosmas and Damian Church that the church doors should be barred at that hour. The church was connected with Boleslas's castle by a private passage where it was deemed the crime could be safely committed.

At the sound of the Mass bell, Wenceslas rose and went towards the church along the passage where Boleslas awaited him. The other conspirators were hidden in an adjoining courtyard.

Wenceslas greeted Boleslas and again thanked him for his hospitality. In response the traitor exclaimed, "Yesterday I did my best to serve you worthily, but this must be my service today!" He drew a sword from beneath his cloak and struck at the head of Wenceslas, who parried the blow, snatched the weapon from his assailant, and threw him on the ground.

Wenceslas might have dispatched Boleslas and remained master of the situation, for the other conspirators rushed forward only when Boleslas's cries for help showed that he was alive, although worsted in combat. However, Wenceslas was no fratricide, even in self-defense, and preferred to succumb rather than kill Boleslas. Cesta, Tyra, and Hnevys dashed to the rescue of Boleslas and stabbed Wenceslas ruthlessly, with one blade-thrust piercing his side. He fell at the church door murmuring, "May God forgive you this, my Brother!"

The date of Saint Wenceslas' martyrdom is September 28th, 929. When the assassins had accomplished their foul deed, they escaped and Drahomira was apprised of her eldest son's tragic fate. Stricken with grief, she hastened to convey the body, covered with wounds, inside the church, whose outside walls were bespattered with blood. The red stains remained visible for centuries.

A legend says that on that ill-starred night, a son was born to Boleslas and named "Strach-Hvas" (Dread Feast) by the people—in allusion to the perfidious banquet given in honor of Prince Wenceslas before he was murdered.

Boleslas took care that the funeral of his brother was carried out with due royal pomp. Father Paul, the former tutor of Wenceslas, had the mournful task of officiating at the burial. The martyr was interred close to the church that was subsequently enlarged to include the grave within its precincts. Drahomira and her devoted daughter, Pribyslava, fearing they too might be victims of Boleslas's partisans, had fled before the funeral took place. Her suspicions were fully justified by the violent deaths that followed of Wenceslas's servants and friends, which included many priests.

Sometime after the martyrdom, Wenceslas appeared to his sister, Pribyslava, and told her where to find (near the church door) his ear, which had been slashed off by a sword cut. She discovered it exactly in the spot indicated and had Wenceslas' coffin opened to place the severed ear near his head. When the body was later transferred to Prague, say the chroniclers, the ear was found adhering to its proper place as firmly as if it had never been detached.

Boleslas, tormented by remorse, sought to make reparation and to ease his conscience by transporting Wenceslas' mortal remains to the capital. He gave orders that this should be done at early dawn, on March 4th, 932, under pain of death for those charged with the task if they delayed in its performance. However, the river Rokytnice was in flood, and therefore impassable. The convoy fell on their knees and implored Saint Wenceslas to help them. They then went to the nearest forest to seek wood for a raft, leaving the coffin on the bank. Upon their return, they saw it on the other side. After fording the stream on horseback, they found the coffin dry and unharmed as if miraculously transported without touching the water. Another obstacle confronted them at the river Vltava where the bridge was broken down. Again, they had recourse to Saint Wenceslas, and suddenly the coffin became so light that they easily waded with it on their shoulders to the opposite bank. A third incident confirmed their trust in the power of the saint. Some distance from the Castle of Prague, the horses drawing the bier suddenly stopped and a team of twelve oxen was requisitioned to replace the horses. The animals strained ineffectually until the arrival of the archpriest of the Church of Our Lady accompanied by his clergy. It was now broad daylight and a great crowd had assembled to join in the archpriest's invocation for Divine assistance. At the close of the prayer, a single team of oxen (all the others having been unyoked) moved forward of their own accord and never paused in the steep ascent until they reached the new Church of Saint Vitus, Wenceslas's own foundation. Here the martyred Prince was interred amidst touching manifestations of love and grief by his devoted people.

The Cult of Saint Wenceslas

Saint Wenceslas was a martyr for the Faith that he had upheld against pagan opposition.

Wenceslas displayed many qualities throughout his life, qualities that prove his sanctity and justify the title of Saint given him by the Czech people. Some of these include:

His zeal for erecting churches that are among the most beautiful in the world;

His maintenance of priests to regularly celebrate the Divine Liturgy and teach their flocks not only religious doctrine, but also every useful branch of knowledge;

His rectitude in forbidding condemnation of accused persons without full proof of their guilt;

His generosity and charity in protecting the humble against their masters;

His refusal to participate in the pagan feasts and rites that were prevalent at that time in Bohemia;

His exemplary life that caused his soldiers and subjects to see in him as a monk rather than a prince.

We have no exact date of his canonization, which was in all probability pronounced by Bishop Detmar or by his successor, Bishop Adalbert, of Prague.

In those days, the process of canonization was not reserved exclusively to the Papacy, as it has been since the reign of Pope Alexander III. Yet, we have incontestable proofs that he was duly canonized, for a Sacramentary of the time of King Otto, crowned in 985, mentions September 28th, in the ecclesiastical calendar, as the Feast of Saint Wenceslas, Martyr.

The concourse of pilgrims to his tomb became so immense that Prince Spytinev constructed a new church with three naves to make room for them. Among the earliest cures carried out at the shrine of Saint Wenceslas were those of a leprous woman and a paralytic from France—both were instantaneous and complete. The Czech people soon attributed a wider scope to the power of Wenceslas, a scope beyond that of healing bodily ills. As fervent lover of his people, Wenceslas was besought in all national crises. The Chronicler Cosmo relates that in 1002, when the Poles invaded Bohemia, Saint Wenceslas protected the land and secured the return of the rightful ruler Oldrich. The victory of Domazlice, gained in 1040 by Bratislas I over the Germans, and another victory in 1126, when Prince Sobeslas defeated the forces of King Lothar, were attributed to the intercession of Saint Wenceslas. In 1260, the army of King Premysl-Ottokar II of

Bohemia was encamped near the village of Kessenbrun at the confluence of the Morava and the Danube. They were surrounded on three sides by the army of Beta II, King of Hungary. The Czechs called on God and Saint Wenceslas, then marched boldly to the attack and routed the enemy.

On the feast of his patron and namesake, King Wenceslas II won a great battle at Sieradce on the Wartha in 1292. On the other hand, we find that it was generally held that no hostilities should be entered upon, if possible, on that day, and truces were often arranged between conflicting parties so the feast could be worthily celebrated.

Relics

Soon after his martyrdom, relics of Saint Wenceslas were laid on the altars of several churches. Bishop Hildibald deposited a piece of linen saturated with Saint Wenceslas' blood in the Saint Lawrence Chapel of Hilberstadt Cathedral in the year 992. Relics of Saint Adalbert and Saint Wenceslas were placed in the High Altar of Eucharist's Church at Trier in 1148. Pieces of his garments were also kept in the churches of Tegernsee, Bamberg, Salzburg, Rhinegan, and Quedlimburg where an altar was consecrated in honor of Saints Remy and Wenceslas. In Bohemia, there are numerous relics of Saint Wenceslas, the Bohemian national saint. The Czech Bishop Daniel deposited them, in the presence of King Vladislav and Queen Judith in the churches of Bohnice, Recany, Cirkvice, and in Saint James's Church of Prague.

Churches

A great number of churches were founded in honor of Saint Wenceslas, notably one at Prosek, near Prague, in 972, and another near the Castle itself of Prague, which was destroyed by Joseph II of Austria in 1782. One of the oldest extant is that of Saint Wenceslas at Stara Boleslav. Prince Svatopluk of Moravia built a church at Olomouc in honor of Saint Wenceslas, and Robert, Bishop of Cracow, consecrated another in that city in the year 1142. In the fifteenth century, two Kings of Bohemia, Ladislav Posthumus and Wenceslas II, appointed priests to say Mass regularly at the altar of Saint Wenceslas in Aix-la-Chapelle. Hundreds of churches dedicated to the national Saint of the Czechs are to be found in various cities of Central Europe and at least four can be found in the United States of America. The basilica of Saint Peter in Rome has a Saint Wenceslas altar erected by Bishop Berka of Olomouc, who died at Rome in 1333. This altar was later dedicated to Saint Erasmus; but Pope Urban VIII ordered that an altar should be dedicated to Saint Wenceslas in the new basilica. This was done in 1628 and his relics

were solemnly transferred at that time. The altar is in the right nave (where the Vatican Council of 1870 was held) and bears the inscription, "*Altar of Saint Wenceslas, Duke of Bohemia, offered by Hynec, Bishop of Olomouc.*"

It was richly endowed for the celebration of Masses and the Office of the Dead.

The Czech people revere Saint Wenceslas as their particular patron and he is honored by the entire Slavic race. On September 28th, in 1092, King Bratislas II assisted at a splendid church celebration of the Feast of Saint Wenceslas and entertained courtiers and nobles with extraordinary magnificence over three days. On this date, national assemblies were usually convoked, churches were consecrated, and important enterprises were begun.

The Office of Saint Wenceslas was introduced in the Roman Breviary in the thirteenth century. The story of Saint Wenceslas, as it now stands in the second Nocturn, dates from the fourteenth century.

When Pope Urban VIII extended the Feasts of Kings Hermengildus and Stephen to the universal Church, Archbishop Matthew Ferdinand Zubeck of Prague obtained the same privilege for the Feast of the Bohemian Prince and Saint Benedict XIII made the Feast obligatory. The Mass and Office had previously been inserted in Missal and Breviary under *Pro aliquibus locis*.

A touching expression of the Czech people's love for Saint Wenceslas is the ancient canticle "*Svaty Vaclave,*" sung today with as much fervor as in the Middle Ages. The author of the first four verses was probably Bishop Bechyne, who composed them at the time of the Brandenburg invasion in 1272. Yet, the Jesuit historian, Father Balbi, ascribes them to Bishop Ernest of Pardubice in the fourteenth century. The Calixtine Hussites themselves chanted "*Svaty Vaclave,*" and bore his image on their shields with the chalice above the banner and the first four lines of the canticle below. One of these shields is preserved in the National Museum at Prague and another in the Hermitage at Petrograd. The canticle has always had a national as well as a religious character. In the rebellion of 1848, against Hapsburg absolutism, the help of Saint Wenceslas was invoked to repel and overcome Germanization.

*Saint Wenceslas, Duke of Bohemia,
Our Prince, Pray for us to God The Holy Spirit.
Christe Eleison!*

*Thou heir of Czech lands, Be mindful of thy race,
Let us not perish, Now nor in future! Holy Wenceslas!
Christe Eleison!*

*We pray thy assistance, Have pity on us!
Comfort the sad; banish all evil, Holy Wenceslas!
Christe Eleison!*

*Beauteous are the celestial courts, Happy he who enters there,
To life eternal, in the radiant glow of the Holy Ghost.
Christe Eleison!*

*Mary, Mother most admirable, Thou powerful Queen,
Pray for us Christians to thy Son, Our Lord.
Christe Eleison!*

*Holy celestial angels, Lead us towards you,
There where praises Rise unceasingly to the Eternal God.
Christe Eleison!*

*All ye Saints, pray for us! Let us not perish!
Saint Vitus, Saint Norbert, Saint Sigmund, Saint Procopius, Saint Adalbert,
Saint John Nepomuk, Saint Ludmila, Saint Wenceslas,
Christe Eleison!*

*Glory to God the Father! Make we the Sign of the Cross!
In the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost!
Christe Eleison.*

The suffragan Bishop of Prague, Thomas Pesina of Cechorod (1680), instituted the custom of a procession from the altar of Saint John Nepomuk to the chapel of Saint Wenceslas in Saint Vitus Cathedral, after Vespers and Benediction on Sundays and feast-days. During the procession, the above canticle is intoned by the Metropolitan Chapter, and taken up by the faithful who join heartily in the homage to their favorite saint.

Homilies and sermons relating to Saint Wenceslas can be traced in documents as far back as the thirteenth century, notably in the collection of Opatovice. A volume entitled, *The Lion of Bohemia*, containing prayers to Saint Wenceslas, was published in 1642. A prayer book edited by the Jesuit Father Konias, in 1727, likewise includes prayers to the Czech Saint.

The memory of Saint Wenceslas was also kept alive by the Drama. Jesuit Fathers were the first to arrange for the performance of a Wenceslas play at the Convent of Saint Nicholas in Prague. Another, entitled "*Christian Bohemia*," was performed in 1583, and a five-act tragedy treating of the Royal Martyr was produced at Olomouc in 1614. Ten years later, it was repeated at Hradec Kralove, and again, in 1649, at Uherske Hradiste. In 1675, there was a production in Prague representing Saint Wenceslas as the devout adorer of the Blessed Sacrament. Scenes from his life were also shown at Kutric Hora in 1679. Young seminarians frequently performed Wenceslas plays in various parts of Bohemia. On September 12th, 1725, there was a performance at Saint Clement's College in Prague.

A play entitled "*Octodecim heroum Christianorum spectacula*," was published by Jules Cortius in 1662 in Prague. Seven years later, William Dondinus published "*Selecta heroum spectacula*" in Munich. Both plays deal with the encounter between Wenceslas and Radslav (Rastislav).

Joseph Cajetan Tyl, a well-known dramatic poet, published in 1849 a play entitled "*Baptism by Blood*," or "*Drahomira and her Sons*." The most famous of Czech poets, Jaroslav Vrhlicky, wrote a poem entitled "*Drahomira and the Brothers*." In 1818, Joseph Linda published a historical novel entitled, "*Christianity Resplendent over Paganism*," or "*Wenceslas and Boleslas*." In our own day, a classic of the theatre repertory is a drama by Doctor Sajc and Mademoiselle Braunerova, entitled "*Saints Ludmila and Wenceslas*" inspired by the monk's (Christian) legend, mentioned earlier. This work is of considerable artistic value and depicts the life and death of Saint Wenceslas in a series of *tableaux vivants*. It has a prominent place in the jubilee programme.

Painters, too, found inspiration in the life of Saint Wenceslas. A hundred years after his death, three scenes from his life were depicted (probably by a monk) for Princess Hemma, widow of Boleslas II. Pictures of Saint Wenceslas are often found in devotional and liturgical books. The oldest portrait now extant, dating from the fourteenth century, is in the Church of Saint Nicholas of Prague. The ancient Veleslavian Bible, preserved in the Lobkowits Library and dating from the fourteenth century; contains a series of illustrations relating to the Saint Wenceslas' life. Another is in the wall of the staircase in the main tower of Karlstein Castle and a third is in the Wenceslas Chapel of Saint Vitus' Cathedral.

In 1670, on the road from Prague to Stara Boleslav, the life of Saint Wenceslas is depicted in the forty-four chapels built at regular intervals of 479 meters (the length of the Charles IV Bridge at Prague). The chapels contain paintings of various shrines of the Blessed Virgin in Bohemia. Scenes from the lives of Saint Wenceslas and the noble founders of these chapels are depicted beneath these chapels. In the church of Stara

Boleslav, there is a painting of Saint Wenceslas by Charles Skreta, an artist of the seventeenth century. A painting by Peter Brandl (1668-1735) is to be found in the Rudolphinum picture gallery and one by the Jesuit Father Ignatius Raab (1715-1787) is found in the church at Prosek.

More recent paintings, are by Emmanuel Ditz in the chapel of the Count Straka Academy where the Confederation of the Czechoslovak Students has its headquarters. There is also a painting by Frantisek Urban in the Collegiate Chapel of Vysehrad, and one by Frantisek Sequenza in the Church of Saint Wenceslas at Smychov. There is a fine picture of Saint Wenceslas painted by Joseph Manes in 1848 on the standard of the National Guard of Hradec Kralove.

There is a fine painting of Saint Wenceslas with a sword in his right hand and a banner with a black eagle on a white ground in his left hand in the basilica of Saint Peter at Rome (grotta Vaticana). Emperor Charles IV is seen kneeling and Saint Procopius, Saint Adalbert, and Archbishop John Ocko are also depicted. A copy has been made by the Czech painter, Hynais, for the Czech College in Rome. Another was made by Joseph Furich. A painting of Saint Wenceslas by Angelo Carossello was placed on September 26th, 1630, over the altar of Saint Wenceslas in Saint Peter's in Rome. It shows Saint Wenceslas as a Roman Emperor with a diadem and below there is another picture of his martyrdom. In the Church of Saint Maria Trastevere, together with a picture of the Annunciation, there is a painting of Saint Wenceslas standing beside Our Lady with banner and sword.

In the Vatican Library there is an ancient Gospel containing the following notes, "It is believed that this book belonged to Saint Wenceslas, Prince of Bohemia, and was brought by him to Stara Boleslav. The Chapter of the Saints Cosmas and Damian Church presented it to Augustine, Slav Archpriest at Brno."

There are many statues of Saint Wenceslas. The oldest and most remarkable is one by Peter Parler (1372) (renovated in 1866 and now adorning the Cathedral in Prague). An equestrian statue in Vysehrad Park is the work of George Pendl (1678). Formerly, it stood in the horse market (now Saint Wenceslas Square). It was in front of this statue that Archbishop Joseph Louis Surench of Prague celebrated Mass in March of 1848, for the delegation about to lay the claims of Bohemia before the Emperor at Vienna. On return of the delegation, it was received by the Municipality, the National Guard, and cheering crowds. A procession formed up and marched to the statue of Saint Wenceslas where the Archbishop sang a Te Deum. Mass was celebrated here again on Whit-Monday, June 12th, 1848, by the patriotic priest, Father John Arnold, who exhorted the excited people to remain calm and hopeful. Since that date, the old market has been called after Saint Wenceslas. In 1908, a new statue replaced the old. It stands six meters high and is the work of the famous sculptor Joseph Vachek, who died in 1926.

It bears the inscription, “*Nedej zahnouti nam ni budoucim!*” (Let not our race perish!) Four other patron saints of Bohemia are grouped around the mounted figure of Saint Wenceslas—Saint Procopius, Saint Adalbert, Saint Ludmila, and Blessed Agnes of Bohemia.

The name and image of Saint Wenceslas are found on coins dating from the reign of Prince Jaromir in the eleventh century; coins of a later date show Wenceslas the Knight with Cross in hand, or Wenceslas the Saint with halo, or Wenceslas the Martyr. The finest engraving is on the coinage of Wladislas I, depicting him as a child borne aloft by two angels. Several Kings of Bohemia had gold coins struck with his image: Wenceslas IV (1378-1419); Wladislas II (1471-1516); Louis I (1516-1526); and Ferdinand I (1526-1564) who was especially devoted to the Patron Saint of Bohemia.

The Czechoslovak Republic, according to a law passed on March 23rd, 1923, had gold coins minted with the image of Saint Wenceslas in armor and included the inscription, “*Let not our race perish,*” on one side and the emblems and inscription of the Republic on the other.

The image of Saint Wenceslas appeared for the first time on the seals of the Sovereigns of Bohemia during the reign of Vladislas II. It shows the Saint seated on his throne. These seals were preserved until the thirteenth century, but disappeared during the reign of Premysl II (1253-1278). The seals of the judicial Court of Bohemia in the time of Premysl Ottokar I bore the image of Saint Wenceslas in warrior's armor with the inscription, “*Judiciary Seal of the Land of Saint Wenceslas, Prince of the Czechs.*”

Similar seals were also used by the Metropolitan Chapter of Prague from the twelfth century onwards, by the administrators of the archdiocese, and by the Utraquist Consistory. The city seals of 1520 show the Saint with lance and escutcheon of the Lion of Bohemia. His martyrdom is depicted on the seals of the Chapter of Stara Boleslav. The seals of Prague University dating from 1350 show Emperor Charles IV kneeling beside Saint Wenceslas. Several cities of Bohemia use seals bearing his image.

While yet hereditary Prince of Bohemia, Emperor Charles IV had a crown wrought that was placed on the Martyr's skull to indicate that he was the real master of the country. Hence, the skull with the crown is not in the tomb, but is preserved in another part of the Cathedral. Since the time of Charles IV, the crown of Bohemia is known as the crown of Saint Wenceslas and the Czechs have been known as the people of Saint Wenceslas. The cult of their Saint has been intimately associated with the national life of the Czechs who turned to him in times of stress and danger. Indeed, the Catholic Faith has been called the Faith of Saint Wenceslas, and the Czech language the language of Saint Wenceslas.

During the fiercest German oppression, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when the language was officially proscribed and spoken only by the peasantry and patriotic

priests, veneration for the national Czech Saint never ceased. The canticle of Saint Wenceslas was sung in the vernacular and frequent pilgrimages were made to his tomb. The people cherish a belief that Svaty Vaclav would one day compass their deliverance. Laity and clergy, especially Jesuits, like Balbin, fostered assiduously the cult of Saint Wenceslas as a gauge of better times to come. The mother of the Jesuit Father Mathias Steyer bequeathed her fortune of 1,300 florins for the publication of Catholic books in the Czech language. This legacy of Saint Wenceslas, founded in 1670 (augmented by generous gifts from the Czech nobility, episcopate, and clergy) distributed over 8,000 books, catechisms, bibles, lives of the saints, religious and national hymnbooks, within three years. By 1752, over 80,000 books had been distributed and there is no doubt that this legacy of a Czech woman saved the written language of the people during the fierce Germanizing campaign. Emperor Joseph II looked askance at the legacy of Saint Wenceslas and finally confiscated "for educational purposes" the fund of 15,676 florins. However, the books that remained were distributed to the people by the Archbishopric of Prague. The Grand Seminary of Saint Wenceslas founded by the Jesuits in 1559 for 150 students fostered the Czech language; but it disappeared with the suppression of the Order and its funds were confiscated by the State. The Czech people never lost heart through the worst period of oppression and the symbolical image of Saint Wenceslas arising with his army from Mount Blanik helped to keep alive their faith in ultimate triumph.

During the world war, the first organization of Czechoslovak legionaries to help the allies took the oath on the Feast of Saint Wenceslas (September 28th, 1914) at Kiev in Russia. On January 1st, 1916, this organization took the regimental name of Saint Wenceslas and bore it until June 1917, after the Retreat of Zborov.

On April 3rd, 1925, the Feast of Saint Wenceslas (September 28th) was made a State Holiday of the Republic of Czechoslovakia. Saint Wenceslas is venerated by the entire nation. Catholics see in him a Martyr and Patron of the Church, while others revere him as a great national hero.

It is noteworthy that during the outburst of iconoclasm after the downfall of Austria, when mobs were egged on to violence by anti-Catholic demagogues and many religious statues were destroyed, not one of Saint Wenceslas was touched. Indeed, Svaty Vaclav means so much to the Czech people that all, without distinction of creed, participate in honoring him.



Der Heilige Wenzeslaus (Saint Wenceslas)

Painted in 1852 by Adolf Zimmerman (1799 – 1859).

It is displayed on the altarpiece of the Church of the Holy Cross, in Gorlitz. *



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This e-book was produced by:

The Seraphim Company, Inc.

**8528 Kenosha Drive
Colorado Springs, CO 80908-5000**

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